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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON,S SEPTEMBER 9 MEETING
WITH PANAMANIAN AMBASSADOR FEDERICO HUMBERT

Classified By: WHA A/S Thomas A. Shannon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) September 9, 2008; 2:00-3:00 p.m.; Washington, DC, USA.

12. (U) Participants:

U.S.
Assistant Secretary Shannon (WHA)
Skye Justice (WHA Notetaker)

Panama
Ambassador Federico Humbert

13. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary Shannon met with Panamanian Ambassador Federico Humbert on September 9, 2008. Humbert, who requested the meeting, previewed Panamanian President Martin Torrijos' September 15-17 visit to Washington, intended to encourage Congressional approval of the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). Ambassador Humbert stated President Torrijos was under great pressure to secure U.S. Congressional approval of the TPA before he leaves office in May 2009, and hoped to secure it during a lame duck session. Humbert briefly discussed the extradition of Manuel Noriega, stating that Panama does not welcome his return and encouraging his speedy extradition elsewhere. He stated Panama was hesitant to recognize Kosovo while condemning Russia's actions in Georgia on behalf of breakaway regions, despite the differences between the two situations. End Summary.

TORRIJOS' LAST PUSH ON TPA

14. (C) Ambassador Humbert stated this will be President Torrijos' last visit to Washington during his presidency, and that it will be difficult for him to return to Panama without a plan for moving forward on the U.S.-Panama TPA. He noted he had received mixed messages from within the Administration regarding the possibility of submitting the Panama TPA to Congress before the approval of the U.S.-Colombia TPA. However, he stated President Torrijos did not want to stand in the way of the Colombia TPA. Torrijos understands the Panama TPA may not be approved until after Colombia, Humbert said, but requests that the Administration submit the Panama TPA as soon as possible. He added that Panama &has the votes8 needed to gain Congressional approval, that substantive labor issues have been addressed, and that former National Assembly President Pedro Miguel Gonzalez is no longer in office. (Comment: Gonzalez was indicted in the United States for the 1992 murder of one U.S. serviceman and attempted murder of another. Members of Congress have cited Gonzalez, position as National Assembly President as the major obstacle to considering the Panama TPA. End Comment.)

15. (C) Humbert stated Torrijos understands that U.S. domestic politics play a significant role in the timing of Congressional submission and approval, and Torrijos does not expect the Panama TPA to be submitted before the U.S. general

election. The GOP is hopeful the TPA will be approved during a lame duck session between the election and the inauguration in January. Humbert noted the GOP has already reached out to the Obama and McCain campaigns to advocate for the TPA. A/S Shannon noted the Administration's continued support for Congressional approval of the Panama TPA, and stated that while he also hoped for a lame duck session, it was not clear whether Congress will hold one.

RETURN OF NORIEGA TO PANAMA WOULD BE A REAL HEADACHE

¶16. (C) Humbert stated the return of Manuel Noriega to Panama would be "a real headache" that the GOP did not welcome. He also noted Noriega's possible return would arise as an issue in Panama's upcoming presidential election. The sooner he leaves the States, the better,8 Humbert said, requesting the USG ensure that Noriega,s extradition elsewhere occurs as quickly as possible.

PANAMA HESITANT TO ACT ON KOSOVO, GEORGIA

¶17. (C) Humbert stated that because the GOP had been "hitting Russia hard" on Georgia, now was not the right time to recognize Kosovo. Not recognizing Kosovo, he said, gives the GOP firmer ground to stand on at the UN when dealing with Russia. A/S Shannon distinguished recognition of Kosovo from the issue of the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, noting that while Kosovo's independence was a result of a comprehensive UN process, Russia,s actions in Georgia were inconsistent with UN Security Council resolutions and international law. A/S Shannon noted that he looked forward to further discussing this issue with Panamanian Vice President and Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis during President Torrijos, visit to Washington.

¶18. (C) A/S Shannon stated Nicaragua would pay a high price for its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Humbert responded that Ortega was merely continuing to isolate himself. A/S Shannon stated while Nicaragua was attempting to curry favor with Russia and emulate Venezuela, re-introducing a relationship of Russian patronage with Nicaragua would be very negative for the hemisphere. He noted that in light of Nicaragua's action, the USG will have to reconsider all aspects of our bilateral relationship, including Nicaragua,s Millennium Challenge Compact.

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